



National Coordinator against
Discrimination and Racism
*Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations*

Equity as a constitutional duty

*Overcoming inequity
between the Europe-
an Netherlands and the
Caribbean Netherlands*

Advice from the National Coordinator
against Discrimination and Racism



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With special thanks to Elodie Kona for her careful editing.

***“Are all Kingdom citizens seen as people,
or are some merely seen as recipients of
policies from The Hague?”***

Lysanne Charles, November 2025*

* Keynote during the NCDR conference Bridging distances: redefining equality in Kralendijk, Bonaire.

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Foreword

Equality is not an abstract principle. It is a duty. A duty that is enshrined in Article 1 of our Constitution and that requires the Dutch State to offer each of its inhabitants, wherever they may live, equal protection, equal rights and an equivalent level of facilities. This duty is clear. Its implementation is not.

This advisory report is about this tension. About the gap between the promises made by the Netherlands and the everyday experience of the inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. About a reality where there is legal equality on paper, but where inequity has an ongoing impact on socioeconomic security, care, education and accessibility. This report goes to the heart of my mandate as National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism: to identify, raise awareness of, and address structural inequality, which cannot be separated from the issue of discrimination in the Netherlands.

This advisory report has been drawn up in close consultation with the public, professionals, public administrators and civil society organisations on the islands. Intensive discussions have been held with partners on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba in the last few years. Resident meetings, expert sessions and discussions with local public administrators and implementing organisations have repeatedly confirmed the same picture: the experience of disadvantage is deep-rooted, widespread and urgent.

A major cornerstone of this report is the NCDR conference that took place in Bonaire in November 2025, which brought together residents, policymakers and experts to discuss what equity means in practice. Not as an abstract ideal, but as a real yardstick for policy and governance. The findings of this conference were pointed, sometimes confrontational, but most importantly, guiding. The passionate appeals shared during the event were not just recorded, they were taken seriously and have been directly incorporated into the analysis and recommendations in this report.

This document is therefore not a desk study. It is a reflection of lived experiences, substantiated with legal and policy-based research and assessed against the reality of everyday life on the islands. It shows how inequity manifests itself in specific domains: from persistent poverty and a vulnerable healthcare system to unequal educational opportunities and limited accessibility. At the same time, it offers a normative framework and a cohesive package of recommendations to actually combat these structural differences. Because they need to be addressed. Fifteen years after the constitutional reform of 10 October 2010, the unavoidable conclusion is that the promise of equity has not been kept.

The population of the Caribbean Netherlands still lives at a disadvantage that cannot be justified within the Netherlands. This disadvantage is not only experienced, but also confirmed in legal judgments and international human rights frameworks. When differences in treatment cannot be explained based on the principle of equality, but arise instead from failure to act, political considerations or administrative inertia, they border on what must be referred to as discrimination. Clarity is needed. This advisory report therefore adopts an explicit stance. Equity is not a long-term goal, but rather a constitutional obligation now. Differentiation is only lawful if it contributes to equality and never if it is used to perpetuate or extend inequality.

The Netherlands is at a turning point. The knowledge is present. The signs are clear. The urgency is unmistakable. What is lacking is for the principle of equality to be applied to policy and implementation in a consistent and enforceable way. This advisory report provides direction for such an approach, by setting out specific proposals for socioeconomic security, healthcare, education and infrastructure, as well as a clear normative compass that focuses on the basic principle of equity. It is essential to acknowledge the historical context. The current inequality does not exist in isolation, but is rooted in a colonial past that still has an impact on contemporary relationships. Anyone who takes equity seriously cannot ignore this history. It is an essential part of both the analysis and the way forward. This preface is therefore also an invitation, and an instruction, to the government, parliament and all government authorities involved. To stop basing their arguments on exceptions, but instead on equality as the standard. To stop limiting themselves to temporary measures, but instead opt for long-term solutions. And most importantly: to actually see inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba as full citizens of the Netherlands, with the same rights, the same protection and the same dignity. Equal treatment is not a courtesy. It is a right. A right that cannot be postponed.



Rabin Baldewsingh,
National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism (NCDR)

Summary

Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba became special municipalities of the Netherlands in 2010. At the time of this reform, the Dutch State pledged to ensure equal rights and an equivalent level of facilities for every inhabitant, wherever they may live in the Netherlands. Fifteen years later, this promise has not yet been kept.

The population of the Caribbean Netherlands experience structural disadvantage in many areas at the same time: high poverty rates, poor healthcare, unequal educational opportunities and limited accessibility. Some of them describe this as discrimination and a violation of Article 1 of the Constitution. The courts recently confirmed this in a case brought by Greenpeace on climate protection in Bonaire, ruling that the Netherlands had breached the prohibition of discrimination in the ECHR (European Convention on Human Rights).

Legal basis: equality on paper, inequality in practice

Article 1 of the Constitution also applies to the Caribbean Netherlands. Yet the system is not working as it should.

The ‘comply or explain’ principle, which means that legislation must also be applied to the islands as standard unless there is a good reason not to do so, is rarely used in practice. Deviations are also rarely or poorly substantiated. Moreover, the comply or explain principle does not resolve existing inequity in older legislation.

Key international human rights conventions also do not apply to the Caribbean Netherlands, despite being applicable to the European Netherlands. Examples include the Istanbul Convention (combating violence against women), the UN Disabilities Convention and the European Social Charter. An Anti-Discrimination Act for the BES Islands did not enter into force until 1 January 2026, fifteen years after the constitutional reform.

What does this mean for the population of the Caribbean Netherlands in concrete terms?

Socioeconomic security

One in three inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands lives in poverty. There are no unemployment benefits or supplementary child benefits. Living costs are significantly higher than the average income. Many of those working, in some cases multiple jobs, are unable to make ends meet. Temporary government measures have reduced the gap to some extent, however some of these measures have now stopped whereas costs have gone up.

Healthcare

On average, inhabitants of the islands are less healthy than inhabitants of the European Netherlands. Medical care is under pressure from staff shortages, a high turnover of healthcare professionals and bureaucratic hurdles. Patients are regularly referred to hospitals outside the islands, with high additional charges. The quality of this foreign healthcare is not always monitored. The healthcare system in Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba is also interconnected to an extent that can hinder quality improvements based on the principle of equity.

Education

Currently, two in three secondary schools fail to meet basic quality standards. Children grow up in poverty, are disadvantaged when it comes to basic skills such as language, and have limited access to specialist support. Almost half of the population of Sint Eustatius is educated solely to primary level. Just 23% of students in higher professional education in the Caribbean Netherlands graduate within five years, compared to 53% of students in the European Netherlands. As many as 91% of young people on Sint Eustatius and Saba want to leave the island.

Access

The cost of travel between the different islands is unaffordable. A return ferry trip from Saba to Sint Maarten costs as much as 158 USD, with flights priced at 425 USD, even though the islands are less than 50 kilometres apart. Roads are in need of updating and have not grown along with the population. Digital access is more expensive and less reliable than in the European Netherlands, whereas this access is increasingly becoming a requirement for work, education and social and personal development.

The normative framework: four basic principles

The NCDR has drawn up four principles on which policy must be based:

1. **Constitutional equality** must not only exist on paper, but be a given in politics, governance and everyday life.
2. **A tailored approach is the exception**, only justified when stemming from the principle of equality, and never as an excuse to delay equity.
3. **The Dutch State has a duty of care**: not only to not discriminate, but also to actively contribute towards equity and not to be an obstacle.
4. **The Netherlands' colonial and slavery past must be recognised** as the context in which the current inequality has arisen, and as an integral part of the way forward.

Recommendations

Cross-domain

- Develop an enforceable equity framework for comply or explain that applies to all laws and regulations, including those that predate 2019.
- Reformulate the differentiation clause in the Constitution.
- Ratify all human rights conventions that do not currently apply to the Caribbean Netherlands by 2030.
- Set up a Caribbean executive pool for flexible and rapid capacity deployment.

Socioeconomic security

- Develop a National Programme for Social Equality and Participation with an implementing taskforce.
- Accelerate the follow-up of all measures set out by the Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee.
- Introduce a price cap for essential utilities and the internet in the short term.
- Make structural improvements to debt assistance.

Healthcare

- Explore and define an institutional separation of roles within the healthcare system, based on the principle of equity.
- Set up a multidisciplinary, scientific advisory board for high-quality care.
- Fully reimburse all costs in the event of medical transfers and minimise additional costs.
- Set up a quality supervision framework for care outside the islands.

Education

- Waive student loans for island children who return, as part of a broader brain gain strategy.
- Extend exception rules for work permits, to enable schools to rapidly attract teaching staff from the region.
- Release long-term funds for the renovation and maintenance of school buildings.

Accessibility and infrastructure

- Set up a BES infrastructure fund for systematic and long-term funding of roads and infrastructure.
- Introduce a Public Service Obligation (PSO) for affordable air travel between the Windward Islands.
- Ensure that the ferry service connection remains affordable through subsidies after 2027.

Box 1: equality and equity

We use the following terms in this advisory report:

- Equality: equal status in laws and regulations.
For example equal rights and equal treatment.
- Equity: everyone gets what they need to have the same opportunities and be able to fully participate in society.
This requires a tailored approach based on the individual's needs.

In this document we have consciously opted to use the terms 'equity' and 'inequity'. These terms acknowledge the structurally disadvantaged position of the inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands compared to the inhabitants of the European Netherlands

1.

**Introduction,
mandate and
scope**

1.1 Motive: inequity within the Netherlands

On 10 October 2010, also referred to as 10-10-10, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba became special municipalities of the Netherlands. This move saw these islands become an integral part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands as the Caribbean Netherlands. By ratifying this constitutional reform, the Dutch state assumed responsibility for and made a pledge to the inhabitants of these islands to ensure equal rights, equal legal protection and an equivalent level of facilities for every inhabitant, wherever they may live in the Netherlands. It has now been over fifteen years since the islands took on this new status, yet the constitutional reform has not resolved the actual inequity. There remain considerable differences between the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands in practice. These differences are reflected in the high poverty rate, basic problems in education and healthcare, as well as accessibility and infrastructural challenges.

This inequity remains largely unsaid in policy circles and in The Hague. There is also a lack of awareness within wider society in the European Netherlands that Dutch citizens on the other side of the Atlantic systematically face inequality of opportunity, poverty and limited facilities. This advisory report acknowledges that the inequity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands is deep-rooted and widespread, and manifests as disadvantage in multiple policy areas at the same time. Inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands describe this disadvantage as a violation of the principle of equity set out in Article 1 of the Constitution and international human rights conventions. The decision in the case brought by Greenpeace against the Dutch State on climate protection in Bonaire was further evidence that this is not a subjective or political interpretation. The court ruled that the prohibition of discrimination in Article 14 of the ECHR (European Convention on Human Rights) had been breached. The court also ruled that the State has not done enough to address the long-term and systematic disadvantage. This decision confirms that structural differences in protection and provisions are legally relevant. These differences also cannot be separated from the long-term and systemic disadvantages faced by the Caribbean Netherlands, in large part as a result of its colonial and slavery past.

There is currently a serious breach of trust between the population of the Caribbean Netherlands and the Dutch State. This breach stems from decades of disadvantage and repeated failure to deliver on promises of equity.

The Netherlands is at a turning point. Following numerous cross-domain and sector-specific reports, the call for basic recognition and structural action is louder than ever. The Dutch government is responsible for delivering on what it keeps promising: Article 1 of the Constitution is not an empty promise, but guarantees equality for every inhabitant wherever in the Netherlands they may live.

1.2 Purpose and nature of this advisory report

The aim of this advisory report is to provide the government and parliament with a clear framework for a long-term approach to eradicate inequity between the European Netherlands and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. The advisory report is cohesive, scientifically substantiated and administratively feasible, and provides insight into the nature and scale of inequity and disadvantage in a number of policy areas. The Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee published a key report in 2023. The conclusion was clear: formal rights are of little value as long as the population of the Caribbean Netherlands remains unable to exercise them to an equivalent extent. This advisory report further translates this conclusion into specific recommendations in several policy areas. The NCDR's aim is to help to formulate the structural changes needed to achieve actual equity.

This advisory report focuses primarily on the government, parliament and policymakers in the European Netherlands. However, it is also directed at local government and civil society organisations on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, as well as local healthcare providers, educational boards and other organisations that experience the consequences of this disadvantage every day.

1.3 Mandate and position of the NCDR

The task of the National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism (NCDR) is to identify, analyse and raise awareness of discrimination and racism in the Netherlands. The situation in the Caribbean Netherlands is central to this mandate. The inequity established does not just relate to unwanted differences in policy and implementation problems. This has to do with key principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment by the State. It is therefore precisely in this area that the NCDR can make a difference.

The NCDR operates independently and issues both solicited and unsolicited advice. This advisory report has been drawn up from this independent position. It is based on scientific literature and policy research and reports from knowledge institutes. Peer advisers and experts were also consulted through various meetings such as town hall sessions, expert sessions and the NCDR conference on Bonaire in November 2025.

The NCDR will not implement the recommendations itself. The aim of this report is to shape policy and decision-making with clear responsibilities for both central government and the local authorities on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

1.4 Approach and method

The NCDR traditionally gathers its input through resident meetings, expert sessions and direct discussions with the public, peer advisers and policy experts. A number of meetings have been organised on the islands and online since 2021, focusing on different types of inequity. A townhall meeting on socioeconomic security was held on Bonaire in 2025, as well as two expert sessions on LGBTQIA+ acceptance. On 27 November 2025, the NCDR organised a large conference at which inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba talked to experts, policymakers, civil servants and top officials from the European Netherlands about what an equal Netherlands means in practice.

The insight gained through these meetings and discussions has been incorporated into this advisory report where relevant. Peer advisers and experts have also read this document. The advice is not an isolated set of rules and is widely supported by civil society organisations and other partners on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, as well as in the European Netherlands.

1.5 Focus and scope

This advisory report focuses on a limited number of key themes, particularly those areas where inhabitants experience the largest inequity. The report therefore does not address issues such as climate change, the democratic deficit, access to financial services, and discrimination and racism on the islands. This does not mean that no inequity exists or no action is needed in these areas. The NCDR calls on partners and ministries to also recognise and address the existing structural inequalities in these areas.

1.6 Reader's guide

This advisory report consists of two overarching parts. Part 1 outlines the situation: what is actually going on, and what does the law say about it? Part 2 draws conclusions: what normative framework is needed, and what specific steps need to be taken?

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to this document. Chapter 2 examines the legal basis for equality: the principle of equality, the comply or explain policy and the position of international human rights conventions. Chapter 3 illustrates the practical impact of inequity on the population of the Caribbean Netherlands in four domains: socioeconomic security, healthcare, education and accessibility. Chapter 4 provides a normative compass for the recommendations. The recommendations and quick wins in each domain are listed in Chapter 5. The report concludes with a final word summarising the advice.

Part 1

2.

**The legal basis for
equality between
the European
Netherlands and
the Caribbean
Netherlands**

The basic principle of human rights is that everyone must be treated equally. This means first and foremost that everyone has the same rights in the eyes of the law. It also means that the government cannot disadvantage any groups or individuals or in any other way discriminate against them. This right is laid down in various legislation, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution. This Constitution became applicable to Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba on 10-10-10.

Whether legal equality exists in practice between the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands is a question that must be examined from various angles. The following sections address three specific questions: how do the principle of equality and the differentiation clause relate to each other? What does the comply or explain principle mean for policy? And which international human rights conventions officially apply to Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius?

2.1 The principle of equality, comply or explain and the differentiation clause

Article 1 of the Constitution provides a constitutional basis for equity between all inhabitants of the Netherlands, and therefore also between inhabitants of the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands. The same article also allows scope to make a fair distinction where necessary. Since 2019, this has been done according to the ‘comply or explain’ principle. The core of this policy framework is that laws and regulations must be the same in European Netherlands and in Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (harmonisation). Deviation from this principle (differentiation) is only permitted in compelling circumstances if a difference can be objectively substantiated. This is an improvement on the previous approach, in which new legislation was consistently slowed to reach the islands in a process known as legislative restraint. Yet comply or explain currently does not steadily result in more equity. The comply or explain principle needs to be applied consistently and with due care, which is currently not done. This creates room for arbitrary political and official implementation of the principle of equality. In other words, whether someone on the islands has the same rights as someone in the European Netherlands often depends on interests other than the pursuit of equity.

For example, there are no clear criteria for substantiating deviations from the laws or regulations. Although such criteria were promised years ago, they have yet been created (De Jong, 2025). Another factor is poor

enforcement of the comply or explain principle in practice, which means that it is simply not applied in many policy processes. The comply or explain principle means that the Caribbean Netherlands must be taken into account as standard when developing policies and laws, including in the Explanatory Memorandum (EM), but also in the initial phases of policy making. The reality is that the majority of decrees provide absolutely no explanation for the exclusion of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. Where such an explanation is given, the reasons stated are often insufficient.

The aim of the comply or explain policy is to ensure equal treatment in laws and regulations. However, this policy primarily applies to new legislation and therefore does not address the major differences that have existed for years under the current legislation. This means that longer standing inequalities are not sufficiently eliminated. As a result, many inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands remain at a disadvantage when it comes to basic rights and protection. So even if the comply or explain principle were to be applied correctly, this would not resolve the existing problem. To summarise: comply or explain is too often not applied or applied incorrectly or in a way that cannot be monitored. The obligation to justify exceptions is therefore lost, leading to structural and unacceptable inequity.

The lack of clarity regarding comply or explain is exacerbated by the differentiation clause in Article 132a paragraph 4 of the Constitution. This clause states that there is scope for differences in exceptional cases, which is already inherent to the meaning of the text Article 1 of the Constitution. In practice, this results in confusion regarding the constitutional basis for differences between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands. Nevertheless, the constitutional basis is and remains Article 1 of the Constitution. This means that differences between the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands are only justified if they arise from the principle of equality, in other words, if a distinction must be made in order to treat people equally.

The legal and normative uncertainty regarding equity has a direct impact on the populations of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. Harmonisation with the European Netherlands is more often the exception than the rule, and no or little explanation is given for deviations. This demonstrates a lack of awareness that the Caribbean Netherlands is an integral part of the Netherlands, and even, in some cases, a lack of interest or priority when it comes to the inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. This inequity has not prompted any political outcry or action. This reinforces the feeling among people in the Caribbean Netherlands that they are treated as second-class citizens based on where they live.

2.2 National and international human rights and legal protection

A number of human rights conventions apply to inhabitants of the European Netherlands, but not to inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. In 2018, the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) advised that it was no longer justifiable for inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands to enjoy less protection against human rights violations (AIV, 2018). The government adopted this recommendation and decided that future human rights conventions would apply to both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands.¹

The most fundamental rights, however, are set out in conventions that predate 2018. Consequently, these rights only apply to the European Netherlands, despite the introduction of comply or explain in 2019 and the AIV's recommendation of the previous year. Such fundamental human rights conventions include the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), the Lanzarote Convention (Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse), the UN Disabilities Convention (Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The European Social Charter also does not apply to the Caribbean Netherlands. As a result, inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba lack the legal protection automatically afforded to inhabitants of the European Netherlands in key areas. The difference in legal protection is not limited to human rights conventions. For example, there are separate versions of the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure for the Caribbean Netherlands that lag severely behind those of the European Netherlands. This is also indicative of the lower level of protection of the same legal interests afforded to inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands. The populations of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba therefore effectively live under a separate regime.

In some cases, plans have been made and steps have been taken to ratify these human rights conventions in the Caribbean Netherlands. Although badly needed, this process has been extremely slow. In cases of most other core human rights conventions, plans for ratification have not yet been drawn up. There is no explanation as to why the Caribbean Netherlands is not entitled to equivalent human rights protection.

¹ Parliamentary Papers II 2018/19, 33 826, no. 29

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has raised this issue with the Netherlands on several occasions. The Dutch State has largely ignored these calls. The continued existence of this divide undermines the credibility of the principle of equality and is morally indefensible. The Dutch State is at fault. It is knowingly failing to protect the human rights of a group of Dutch citizens, despite the State's moral responsibility and duty to provide for all its inhabitants.

Box 2: Anti-Discrimination Protection Act for Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba

Equal treatment legislation is an important component of human rights protection in the Netherlands. These laws make the obligations arising from Article 1 of the Constitution tangible and applicable in practice. With effect from 10-10-10, equal treatment legislation was not directly applicable to Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. The Netherlands was still committed to a policy of legislative restraint at this time. This immediately led to a large inequality between the two parts of the Netherlands. In effect, inhabitant of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba had less human rights protection in both a legal and practical sense than their fellow citizens in the European Netherlands.

It eventually took fifteen years to address this inequality. The Anti-Discrimination Protection Act for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba entered into force on 1 January 2026, removing a significant difference in the protection of human rights in the Caribbean Netherlands. For example, inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands can now file a request with the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights. They also have access to an antidiscrimination agency.

2.3 A comparison: the Netherlands versus France

The Netherlands is not the only country with ties to former colonies. Yet countries differ considerably in their approach to postcolonial relations, particularly when it comes to the principle of equity. Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are classed as ‘special’ municipalities within the Netherlands. The Constitution also contains a differentiation clause that allows deviations. France has made a different choice. Its Overseas Territories such as Guadeloupe, Martinique and La Réunion are an integral part of the French Republic. The principle of assimilation législative is enshrined in the French Constitution. French laws and regulations automatically apply to these territories (Hoogers & Karapetian, 2019). There is scope to take the local context into account, but this plays less of a central role in the Constitution. Equality is the clear underlying principle of the law.

This difference is also visible in practice. Inhabitants of the French islands are entitled to the same social security schemes, the same statutory minimum wage (SMIC) and the same pension rights as inhabitants of the French mainland. The overseas departments are individual constituencies in the Assemblée nationale and appoint their own senators to the Senate through electoral colleges. Conversely, the representation of inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba in the Dutch parliament is described as a democratic deficit (see also Veenendaal, 2025). The islands do not have any directly elected representatives in institutions such as the House of Representatives. Although formal agreements have been reached on democratic participation, such participation remains limited in practice. Social security is another area in which there is major inequity. The differences between the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands on this key issue are impossible to justify.

EU law applies in full to the French overseas departments. These territories have ‘Outermost Regions’ (OMR) status within the European Union, with scope for specific adjustments where necessary (Hoogers & Karapetian, 2019). A different situation applies to Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. They have ‘Overseas Countries and Territories’ (OCT) status, which means that EU law does not apply in full and inhabitants have little access to European social rights. The French system also has weaknesses, but does offer an important starting point to learn from: equality is the standard and deviations from equality are the exception.

2.4 Interim conclusion

On paper, the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands are legally equal. In practice they are not. It is not clear when different rules are or are not permitted (differentiation), the comply or explain principle has been redefined and key human rights conventions have still not been ratified. As a result, inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba do not enjoy the same protection and legal certainty as inhabitants of the European Netherlands. There is no possible justification for this legal inequality and unequal treatment.

But the consequences are not limited to the legal domain. The legal and regulatory shortcomings have an impact on the everyday lives of inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands. The next chapter looks at the specific details of this impact. It shows what it means to live with a care system that permits inequality, within an education system that places people at a disadvantage, or without the infrastructure needed to fully participate. Anyone who wants to understand the position of people in the Caribbean Netherlands must start with this perspective.

3.

**What inequity
means in practice
for the people
of the Caribbean
Netherlands**

Non-compliance with Article 1 of the Constitution and inconsistent implementation of the comply or explain principle are not abstract governance issues. They have a direct and tangible effect on the daily lives of the population of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Discussions with inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands keep coming back to the same issues: socioeconomic security, healthcare, education, connectivity (mobility) and infrastructure. In this chapter, we discuss these four domains based on a brief description of the current situation and an analysis of the main problems.

3.1 Poverty as a benchmark for inequity

The 2023 anti-poverty protests in Bonaire left little room for doubt. Placards bore messages such as “hey, shall we start doing something about racism and discrimination” and “yes to differentiation, no to discrimination”. This was a clear sign from the public that they were no longer prepared to be treated differently to the European Netherlands (Caribbean Network, 2023). Legal challenges have also been brought against this inequity. In 2022, the Bonaire consumer’s association Unkobon went to court to argue that the Dutch State discriminates against its inhabitants in the Caribbean Netherlands because they are unable to achieve an adequate standard of living. This is the area in which the promise of 10-10-10 has been delivered on the least, with the tangible effects.

The report of the Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee refers to living conditions in the Caribbean Netherlands that are ‘unworthy of the Netherlands’ (Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee, 2023, p. 7). One in three inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands lives in poverty compared to 3.1% in the European Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2025a). Key social provisions such as unemployment benefits and supplementary child benefits do not exist in the Caribbean Netherlands. Debt assistance is still at an early stage and is largely dependent on the efforts of local authorities. At the same time, living costs are much higher than the average income (particularly for people in receipt of the minimum wage or social assistance). The housing sector faces challenges such as long waiting lists, a lack of sufficient housing subsidies and a shortage of affordable rented homes. These circumstances contribute to the unacceptable poverty rate on the islands.

At the same time we see a contradiction: the unemployment rate in the Caribbean Netherlands is low, while the poverty rate is worryingly high. The figures show how large the group of ‘working poor’ really is. These are people with multiple jobs who, despite several incomes, are unable to make ends meet due to the extremely high cost of living in relation to low wages. Long-term poverty has serious consequences. It affects family life, the health of the individual and society as a whole (UNICEF, 2024a,b,c). Multiple jobs and long-term poverty lead to chronic stress and social exclusion, but also a higher risk of neglect, child abuse and domestic violence (Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee, 2023, UNICEF, 2024a,b,c). Poverty also increases the risk of labour market exploitation and violates human dignity. Social pain resulting from inequity, exclusion and poverty has a demonstrably negative impact on human development, and particularly child development (UNICEF, 2019).

Poverty also leads to greater inequity between island communities themselves. The local population and other communities of colour are significantly more likely to live below the minimum income standard. The local population is ‘priced out of paradise’: the lower-budget supermarkets on Bonaire are concentrated around Kaya Industria, but people without transport are often unable to access these stores. Residents rely on the more expensive supermarkets and minimarkets in districts such as Antriol, where the average household lives in poverty. Households with a low disposable income therefore have less access to more affordable alternatives on the island. At the same time, people from the European Netherlands and other newcomers from Europe, who are often white, enjoy a level of prosperity that is way above the minimum income standard. The existing system thus maintains a hierarchy in which the white population are at the top of the economic ladder.

For Sint Eustatius and Saba, a strong dependence on Sint Maarten plays a negative role. Many products, including food, are imported. When prices go up on Sint Maarten, people on Sint Eustatius and Saba foot the bill.

The Dutch government has since taken steps to tackle poverty and to safeguard the socioeconomic security of the islands’ inhabitants. The year 2024 saw an increase in benefits and wages, an extension of leave arrangements and the introduction of temporary subsidies for utilities. A specific social minimum was also established, although this has not yet been laid down by law.² These measures are estimated to have closed the

² A social minimum has not yet been enshrined in law as is the case in the European Netherlands, including linking benefits to minimum wages and automatic adjustments for inflation.

financial gap between income and expenditure by around half, but this is not enough to absorb the high costs of living. Broader measures, such as sufficient housing subsidies and improved public transport, are needed to close the remaining gap. No broader measures are currently being taken. At the same time, most of the temporary subsidies for utilities have come to an end in 2026 despite rising costs. High energy and water prices in particular, along with ongoing price increases, are placing households under further pressure (Centraal Dialoog, 2026).

The Dutch State's efforts to combat poverty therefore remain insufficient. These efforts are inconsistent and barely perceptible for many people. After income policy was reinforced in 2024, there has even been a standstill or decline in a number of areas. Large holes also remain in the social safety net. Some benefits do not exist, others are too low, and an unemployment scheme is yet to be introduced (Central Dialoog, 2026).

Organisations such as the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG, 2026) and local partnerships such as Centraal Dialoog (2026) and Unkobon (2022) agree on this point. Policy on socioeconomic security for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba calls for structural and long-term measures. One-off financial interventions do not reflect the severity and duration of the poverty problem, which is the result of years of neglect and can be traced back to the Netherlands Antilles era. This requires an ongoing flow of funds, but also courage on the part of the government. Serious and continuous investment in socioeconomic security is needed in order to follow the advice of the Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee. Here, equity with the European Netherlands does not mean doing the same thing everywhere but instead investing unequally. During the NCDR conference this was aptly termed 'comply plus'. The extent and gravity of the disadvantages means that an above-average effort is needed to achieve equity.

3.1.1 An integrated approach to poverty and socioeconomic security

Poverty affects a number of key issues in this advisory report, making it a precondition for equity and equal opportunities for inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Without structural and sufficient investment in combating poverty, improvements in health, education and infrastructure remain vulnerable and unevenly distributed. The NCDR therefore stresses that socioeconomic security is not a single policy issue, but rather a fundamental benchmark for the Dutch government's actions in the Caribbean Netherlands. Based on this urgency and association, the following sections look at healthcare, education, connectivity and the infrastructure in the Caribbean Netherlands.

3.2 The ‘island penalty’ for medical care

On average, inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba have more health problems than inhabitants of the European Netherlands (Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee, 2023). This disadvantage is related to structural circumstances such as a high poverty rate, poor housing, the effects of climate change for vulnerable groups and limited access to affordable and healthy food. Together with consistent problems with the access and quality of medical care, they lead to ongoing health inequity within the Netherlands. They also show that an integrated approach is essential.

The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) has established minimum system objectives that healthcare must meet in order to contribute to a healthy and resilient Netherlands. These objectives are enshrined in instruments such as the Comprehensive Care Agreement (IZA) and the National Health Information System Vision and Strategy. They relate to the accessibility, quality and affordability of healthcare. The incorporation of these objectives into policy and implementation has earned the Dutch healthcare system a strong global reputation. In practice, this reputation mainly applies to the European Netherlands. Although dignified and equivalent healthcare has been a guiding principle for the Caribbean Netherlands since 2022³, in reality there are still structural inequalities. These inequalities are most visible in the key issues addressed by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport’s system objectives, such as the accessibility and quality of healthcare.

3.2.1 Starting point for equivalent care

The World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) uses the term ‘island medicine’ to refer to medical care in isolated communities, where the emphasis lies on continuity, personal relationships in care and avoiding referrals to care outside the island as much as possible (WONCA, 2019). For the Caribbean Netherlands, this term is too often used to justify lower care standards, to accept limited availability and to allow less legal protection. ‘Island medicine’ therefore risks whitewashing unjustified inequity and losing sight of the key question: does the healthcare system comply with the principle of equity?

³ The Dutch government has talked about an equivalent level of facilities in relation to healthcare since 2022; Parliamentary Papers II 2022/23, 36200 XVI, no. 8

A clear and normative decision is needed if this situation is to change. The question is not what is feasible on the islands, but what the population need as a minimum to receive the same care, quality and legal protection as everyone else. This means bringing an end to the island penalty, and additional measures to ensure the principle of equity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands where necessary. This starting point allows scope to look for creative solutions, even if these solutions are complex or costly.

3.2.2 Continuity of care

Medical care on the islands is under pressure, and staffing levels play a major role in this respect. Doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians and other care professionals often work on the islands for only a short time, in some cases just a few months. As a result, inhabitants often deal with different care professionals or are forced to go to another island for the same treatment. This has a negative impact on the continuity of patient-oriented care. It also affects the quality of care. When there is a rapid turnover of practitioners, it becomes difficult to build up a long-term treatment relationship and gather sufficient knowledge about individual patients and the local and cultural context. Experiences in mental healthcare within Mental Health Caribbean show that a longer minimum appointment term leads to greater stability and better quality of care. A certain degree of rotation is sometimes inevitable in an island context, because the number of inhabitants is usually too small to have all specialisms available at all times. However, continuity of staff remains essential for good and people-oriented healthcare. The island scale should not be used to justify minimal effort in relation to continuity and therefore lower quality or less accessible healthcare.

3.2.3 Access to care

Access to healthcare on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba is determined by financial, geographical, cultural and supply-related factors (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2024).

Geographical factors

The limited scale of the islands means that patients must often be referred to healthcare outside the island. External referrals are unavoidable to a certain extent, however this healthcare must be organised based on the principle of equity. This means looking not just at quality, but also avoiding imposing unnecessary burdens on patients and their families.

Access to healthcare in the Caribbean is further complicated by political and administrative boundaries. National rules entered into force on 10-10-10 that do not always take into account the proximity of a hospital or the urgency of the situation. The result is that available and necessary healthcare can be refused or considerably delayed, which can prove life-threatening in serious cases. It is difficult to explain why healthcare or urgent care can sometimes be accessed on Guadeloupe but not on closer islands that are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Such bureaucratic obstacles must be removed to ensure that patients receive the care they need on time.

Financial factors

Medical transfers and treatments outside the island also involve indirect costs for patients and their families, such as travel costs and loss of income. This burden is made greater by the fact that a lot of healthcare legislation that offers financial protection in the European Netherlands is not or only partially applicable to the Caribbean Netherlands. Inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba therefore have less protection, while the cost of living on the islands is high and medical transfers already involve a heavy mental and emotional burden.

Equivalent access to healthcare without an island penalty means that specialist healthcare must be available to inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands within reasonable standards. Regional healthcare referrals must always go hand in hand with full cover of medical travel expenses, including travel time, waiting time and assistance costs. These costs cannot be a barrier to accessing healthcare. They need to be explicitly recognised as an integral part of healthcare law, because the constraints to healthcare access are not just medical but also financial and social.

3.2.4 Quality of care

Limited access to healthcare also influences the quality of care delivered. In the European Netherlands, GP referrals to a secondary setting are subject to a strict system of oversight and accountability that centres around patient safety. This is the responsibility of the healthcare insurers. The Health and Youth Care Inspectorate (IGJ) oversees care provision and the quality of care. In the Caribbean Netherlands, patients are often referred to hospitals abroad or on other islands in the Caribbean. The quality of these hospitals is not always clear and sometimes demonstrably lower. This is particularly an issue in the case of referrals to countries such as Colombia, but sometimes also applies to hospitals on Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

As a healthcare buyer, Care and Youth Caribbean Netherlands (ZJCN) has no objective and independently assessed information on the quality of care purchased outside the Caribbean Netherlands, with the exception of purchased healthcare in the European Netherlands.⁴ And yet the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport procures care from these hospitals. If the basic principle is equity, quality of care must be assessed in the same way before this care is purchased. Patient safety in the Caribbean Netherlands merits the same protection as that of patient safety in the European Netherlands, including equal legal protection in the event of medical transfers.

At the same time, local care provision is under pressure because qualified doctors and specialists from Latin America are often unable to work on the islands. They are not BIG registered and must apply for a BES exemption, however these applications are frequently rejected. The required documents are often in Spanish and are therefore not always considered by the competent authority in the European Netherlands. Differences in training and healthcare systems also mean that information is not always available in the required Dutch format. This leads to an ironic situation in which patients are referred to foreign doctors who are not able to work on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba themselves. At the same time, the bureaucratic rules governing BIG registration, such as the requirement for recent work experience, make it less attractive for doctors from the European Netherlands to work on the islands (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2024).

Two contradictions lie at the heart of this matter. On the one hand, rules prevent regional doctors with relevant qualifications from working within the local healthcare system while care purchased abroad is not covered by the same quality and oversight framework. On the other hand, it is sometimes the same care providers that are not allowed to work on the islands who carry out the treatment in the foreign hospitals to which patients are sent. This places pressure on the quality of care in two ways: locally due to too many rules and an insufficiently tailored approach, and externally due to a lack of oversight. Equivalent care means applying the same quality standards to both the deployment of regional care professionals and the procurement of care abroad.

⁴ This also applies to healthcare on the islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This is an autonomous matter into which the IGJ (or the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport/ZJCN) has no insight.

3.2.5 The care relationship between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands

The accessibility and quality of healthcare is closely linked to the institutional set-up of the care relationship with the European Netherlands. In the Caribbean Netherlands, responsibility for healthcare lies directly with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS). The Care and Youth Caribbean Netherlands (ZJCN) department develops policy and legislation as well as implementing care and youth care on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. The Ministry also fulfils the role of health insurer and healthcare buyer through the Health Insurance Office for the Caribbean Netherlands (ZVK). The ZVK implements public health insurance. This is the role fulfilled by private health insurers in the European Netherlands.

The current set-up of the healthcare system concentrates a large number of powers within a single ministerial structure. Policy making, implementation, procurement, health insurance and oversight all come under the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. Some interdependence is not unique: multiple roles are often combined within a single public organisation in similar island contexts. But combining so many roles with limited financial resources and expertise within a single organisation is a considerable risk to the quality of healthcare in the Caribbean Netherlands. This interdependence also increases the risk of insufficient countervailing power, limited external quality control and reduced transparency. Such institutional interdependence is inconceivable in the European Netherlands and discouraged for good reason (Council for Public Health and Society, 2009). The question is therefore whether the current organisational form establishes a good basis for equivalent care on the islands.

Many advisory and research bodies that oversee the quality of care in the European Netherlands have no or only a voluntary mandate for the Caribbean Netherlands, despite the complexity of its healthcare system (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2024). The Council for Public Health and Society (RVS), the National Healthcare Institute (ZIN), the Dutch Healthcare Authority (NZa) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) review the functioning of the healthcare system in the European Netherlands on an ongoing basis. In the Caribbean Netherlands, only the Health and Youth Care Inspectorate (IGJ) structurally fulfils such a role. This leaves little scope for independent, critical assessment and therefore also quality improvement from the perspective of equivalent care for inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands.

The fact that the healthcare situation in the Caribbean Netherlands does not comply with the principle of equity has been noted on numerous occasions. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 2025), and the National Ombudsman (2026) have raised structural deficiencies in the right to health in the Caribbean Netherlands. Long-term improvements in healthcare on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba require targeted action on access, quality and affordability. This calls for healthcare legislation that does not exist yet, as well as serious consideration to culturally sensitive healthcare and continuity. The Netherlands can only deliver on this promise in the Caribbean if equity is the real starting point.

3.3 Education in the shadow of inequity

Education is key to child development. Not only does it provide the skills and knowledge needed to fully take part in society, but it also opens the door to the future, such as personal growth, active citizenship and labour market opportunities. Good education contributes to equal opportunities by giving every child the chance to develop their talents and find an equivalent place in society. The school system must be a safe haven where children can develop. At the same time, education is often where inequity begins. Unequal educational opportunities impact on the rest of a child's life and have consequences for society as a whole. High-quality education leads to professional knowledge and skills, and thus young people who can contribute to the islands' local economy, community and social and cultural development.

Figures published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) provide an indirect view of the state of education and educational backgrounds. Just over half the population of Bonaire aged fifteen and over is educated solely to primary level. On Sint Eustatius, this is true of around 45% of the population (CBS, 2025b).⁵ By comparison: 40.8% of the population of the European Netherlands have a senior general secondary education, pre-university education or secondary vocational education 2-4 educational background (CBS, 2024).

⁵ The picture is different on Saba due to the presence of the Saba School of Medicine. The students at this university come primarily from North America and remain on the island for no longer than 20 months for their studies.

Educational institutions in the Caribbean Netherlands became part of the Dutch education system on 1 January 2011. To assess whether the intended quality improvements have been achieved, the Education Inspectorate has established minimum characteristics that education must meet. These are referred to as basic quality standards and are used to assess whether the education on the islands is of sufficiently high quality and offers the same educational opportunities to children in the Caribbean Netherlands as in the European Netherlands. The latest inspections show that most primary schools in the Caribbean Netherlands now meet the basic quality standards. The situation in secondary education is different. Two in three schools do not meet the basic quality standards, and pre-vocational secondary education in the third secondary school also does not meet these standards.⁶ The following sections describe the circumstances and recurring issues that contribute towards unequal educational opportunities.

3.3.1 An equal start

Equal educational opportunities begin with an equal start, but this is precisely where the structural inequity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands are visible. Many children in the Caribbean Netherlands grow up in circumstances that place them at a disadvantage to their peers in the European Netherlands even before their first day of school.

Socioeconomic security

Socioeconomic security is a basic condition for equal opportunities in education. In 2022, around 25% of children on Bonaire and Saba and 28% on Sint Eustatius were at risk of poverty (Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee, 2023). Poverty not only increases the risk of health problems and social exclusion, but also leads directly to learning and developmental delays.

⁶ The Education Council is currently investigating the state of education on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. This research will look at how education on the islands functions within the Dutch education system, with a focus on six key themes: multilingualism, the educational offering, transitions within education, inclusive education, administrative power and the teacher shortage. The publication is expected in April 2026.

Many parents are forced to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. This means that they have less time to assist their children at home and increases the risk of neglect. Period poverty is another concrete example of how financial problems have a knock-on effect on education. Lack of money means that some girls do not have enough access to period products, which can lead to nonattendance, shame and difficulty concentrating. Pupils in secondary education often also contribute to the family income, which has a negative impact on their academic performance and increases the risk of them dropping out of school early. These circumstances occur more often and to a greater extent on the islands than in the European Netherlands, exacerbating existing inequality in education and in progression to further education.

Basic skills

Language plays a major role in pupils' unequal starting position. The language of instruction on Bonaire is Dutch, whereas most children speak Papiamentu, Spanish or English outside school. There are still very little teaching materials available for Dutch as a second language⁷, which leads to learning disadvantages and unequal opportunities for progression. Pupils who do not speak Dutch at home, who include newcomers from Latin America, are therefore less likely to attain the same level of education as their Dutch-speaking, often white, peers. They are relatively more likely to end up in practice-oriented education, even if they are capable of following a theoretical learning pathway. This division is still visible in secondary education on Bonaire.

Education on Sint Eustatius and Saba operates according to the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) system, with English as the language of instruction. Unlike on Bonaire, this corresponds directly to the language spoken on the islands. However, Dutch is a compulsory subject in secondary education and concludes with a CXC exam. Although there are advantages to this multilingual set-up in principle, there are clear constraints in practice. For many pupils, the level of Dutch achieved is not high enough to progress smoothly to further education in the European Netherlands or to public service jobs on the islands (see also 3.3.3.). Under the current format this leads to structural disadvantages and unequal opportunities.

⁷ The Public Body of Bonaire is currently working with institutes in Aruba and Curaçao to develop methods for Dutch as a second language. Although education is a matter for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Public Body of Bonaire has assumed responsibility in this area due to the severity and impact of the divide that has arisen in education. Development of the methods is being financed from the Slavery Fund.

Specialist support

Unequal opportunities also occur in the support for pupils with additional educational or care needs. The centres of expertise for special educational needs (EOZ)⁸ are often only able to offer a few hours of support each day, which is not enough for pupils with more complex problems. The need for this support is great. The vulnerable circumstances in which many children grow up, due to issues such as poverty, mean that more pupils in the Caribbean Netherlands have learning and developmental delays than in the European Netherlands. On Saba, more than 25% of primary school pupils had special educational needs in the 2024-2025 academic year compared to 4.8% in the European Netherlands.⁹

At the same time, support in the classroom is lacking within mainstream education. Consequently, pupils with severe educational or care needs are not always appropriately accommodated and therefore end up at home. The alternative is for them to remain in mainstream education without sufficient support, placing their development and wellbeing, as well as those of their classmates, at risk. Many families then have only one remaining option: to relocate to a larger island. Practical and financial support for such a move is often lacking. In the European Netherlands, it would be inconceivable for there to be no appropriate place in education for children with a disability or additional support needs. Yet the small scale of the islands is often misused in practice as a reason to accept inequity.

3.3.2 High-quality education

Equal educational opportunities are directly dependent on the quality of education. The Primary Education (BES Islands) Act (Wpo BES) and the Secondary Education Act 2020 (Wvo 2020) impose minimum requirements on education in the Caribbean Netherlands, for example in relation to classroom time and learning outcomes. In practice, ensuring high-quality education is complicated by a number of recurring issues.

⁸ Centres of expertise for special educational needs (EOZ) offer assistance to pupils and students who are at risk of failure within the education system due to learning, social, emotional and/or behavioural problems. This involves providing care on top of the care already provided by the school.

⁹ [Pupil numbers | Themes | The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in figures](#)

Shortage of teaching staff

Teaching staff are the backbone of the education system, but this foundation is under considerable pressure. Ongoing teacher shortages and high staff turnover pose a serious threat to the educational opportunities of pupils in the Caribbean Netherlands. For years now, schools have struggled to fill vacancies in good time. The problem is not just the number of teachers, but also the lack of staff who remain working on the islands for longer periods. Those who work on the islands for only a short period have little time to build up long-term relationships with pupils, adjust their teaching to individual needs and develop effective approaches.

The shortage is exacerbated by the work permit system. Few local teachers are available on Saba and Sint Eustatius, leading schools to recruit within the region. Applying for work permits is a time-consuming and complex process that is often not completed in time, despite the existing exemption schemes. Many schools start the academic year without a full complement. This undermines the continuity of the education, as well as placing systematic pressure on quality.

Curriculum

In addition to national quality standards, it is important that teaching is in line with pupils' everyday lives. Education can never be separated from the environment in which children grow up. When teaching programmes are developed mainly from a European Netherlands or broader Western perspective, a gap can emerge with the daily reality of pupils on the islands. They then identify less with the teaching materials, examples and approaches used, which can lead to a lower level of involvement and a sense of detachment.

Equity also means that pupils on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba see their own history, language, culture and social issues reflected in the education system. Education that takes into account the local context and provides scope for a tailored approach contributes to better learning achievements, a strong sense of identity and the awareness that pupils are an integral part of the Netherlands.

Educational accommodation

The state of educational accommodation in the Caribbean Netherlands is another fundamental area of inequity and an obstacle to effective education. High-quality education requires safe, well-maintained and future-proof school buildings and outdoor spaces. Long procedures, maintenance backlogs and delayed investments mean that pupils spend years learning in buildings that do not meet safety and quality requirements. Some schools have now been refurbished or renovated, but the cost of the remaining accommodation task will not be taken into account until the 2027 central government budget. As a result, construction and renovation projects on Bonaire and Sint Eustatius will not be completed until 2029 at the earliest.¹⁰ This delay is difficult to reconcile with the urgent need for good learning conditions. It raises the question of whether pupils in the Caribbean Netherlands are being given sufficient priority.

3.3.3 Progression to further education and the labour market

A good education system ensures smooth and promising progression to further education and the labour market, including for young people who want enter entrepreneurship. Local talent and professional knowledge play an essential role in the social and economic development of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. However, such progression is not a given for pupils and young people on the islands. Recurring issues needlessly hamper the step to further education or a long-term job, leaving talent untapped and curbing the islands' development.

Starting qualification

A starting qualification (a diploma at a minimum of secondary vocational education level 2, a senior general secondary education diploma or pre-university education certificate) is the minimum basis for long-term progression to further education or work. In the Caribbean Netherlands, this basis remains out of reach for a large proportion of the population. Around 60% of the population aged 15 and over on Saba have a starting qualification. This percentage is significantly lower on Bonaire and Sint Eustatius, namely around 53% and 42% respectively (CBS, 2025b).

¹⁰ Parliamentary Papers I, 2025/26, 36 600 VIII, Z

A large proportion of the population are therefore insufficiently prepared for the labour market and society. Those without a starting qualification have greater difficulty finding stable work and often end up in low-paid or temporary jobs. This has a knock-on effect on the next generation: children of parents without a qualification are demonstrably less likely to obtain a qualification themselves. The result is an accumulation of socioeconomic disadvantage. In the European Netherlands, a much larger proportion of the working population has a starting qualification. An increase in this proportion in the Caribbean Netherlands is therefore not only good for individuals: it is an essential prerequisite for real equity between the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands.

Further education outside the island

Alongside progression to the labour market, progression to further education is also problematic. The small scale of the islands means that students are often forced to go to the region, the United States or the European Netherlands for further education. This requires good preparation in secondary education, but also structural guidance and financial support to ensure that academic success does not depend on a family's ability to pay. Universities of applied science in the European Netherlands specify language as one of the biggest obstacles for Caribbean students, in addition to culture shock, a limited network and financial problems (see i.a. National Ombudsman, 2020). Just 23% of students in higher professional education in the Caribbean Netherlands graduate within five years, compared to 53% of students in the European Netherlands.¹¹ Equity means that pupils on the islands must be given the opportunity at school to develop the language skills they need to follow a Dutch-language study programme. They also need better guidance, both during their studies in the European Netherlands and in the event that they return to the islands.

Better progression to appropriate further education and the labour market is essential for both young people's personal development and the islands' long-term socioeconomic development. Actual equal opportunities require equal educational opportunities. Giving young people better prospects and a higher standard of living makes them more likely to see a future for themselves on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Only then can talent be retained, attracted and utilised, and can all children and young adults fully participate in Dutch society.

¹¹ This percentage includes students from Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

Brain drain and brain gain

At present, as many as 91% of young people from Sint Eustatius and Saba want to leave the island. This proportion is 81% on Bonaire (CBS, 2025c). The reasons differ. For many young people, leaving for a time or for good is part of becoming an adult. It is an opportunity to see the world and receive a better education. However, the islands have long suffered from a structural brain drain as many of the young people who leave to study or work do not come back. The result is a loss of knowledge, skills and future leadership, with all the associated consequences. The Focused Growth report of the State Commission Demographic Developments Caribbean Netherlands shows that young professionals must be encouraged to return to the islands in order to maintain and foster social functions within an ever-ageing population. These are also signs of inequity, since many young people want to eventually return but hesitate to do so because the prospects of socioeconomic security, access to healthcare and the labour market are limited. This hampers the islands' development, leaving them lagging behind the European Netherlands.

Achieving equity also presents an opportunity for brain gain by encouraging island children who have studied or worked elsewhere to return. The work of the Strategic Education Alliance (SEA) shows that this is possible, for example through mentoring, improved educational infrastructure and measures that make it attractive for island children to return.

3.4 Accessibility as a precondition for participation

Accessibility is essential for the socioeconomic security of the Dutch population. Mobility is not just about physical travel but also social connection. It determines whether inhabitants are able to participate, utilise their talents and feel part of a community. Good connectivity (inter-island transport), reliable digital services and sound physical infrastructure are also requirements for exercising constitutional rights such as the right to participate and the right to education and healthcare.

3.4.1 Connectivity

On Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, the inequity starts with the question of whether you are able to travel. This is because the Caribbean Netherlands is a long way behind in terms of connectivity and physical infrastructure. In June 2025, the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) found that there is undesirable inequality in policy on the physical living environment. The ongoing unequal approach to policy is leading to an accumulation of disadvantage and an increase in inequity (Rli, 2025).

The government acknowledged this in autumn 2025 and agreed to undertake a long-term cooperation programme with the islands.¹²

The limited connections between Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten as a key hub for the Windward Islands have a direct impact on economic development, wellbeing, social participation and the risk of isolation (SEO, 2023). The connection between Sint Eustatius, Saba and Sint Maarten, referred to as the SSS islands, is vital for access to services, healthcare, family visits and travel to the European Netherlands or Bonaire. At the same time, accessible connectivity between Bonaire and the Windward Islands is equally important. Most importantly for the purpose of togetherness and collaboration between the islands that make up the Caribbean Netherlands. The high cost of ferry and flight tickets mean that, at present, accessibility largely depends on income. Consequently, it is the most vulnerable groups such as young people and those on a low income who are disproportionately affected in terms of their ability to participate in society.

Box 3: the costs of connectivity

A return ferry ticket to Sint Eustatius via Sint Maarten costs around \$158. A flight ticket costs up to \$425. The flight between Saba and Sint Eustatius takes just 12 minutes, making it one of the most expensive flights per minute in the world. If the same price per kilometre applied to a return flight between Amsterdam and Bonaire, it would cost around €72,000. There is no direct connection between Bonaire and Saba or Sint Eustatius. Anyone wanting to travel between these islands must go via Sint Maarten, which means that a return ticket can cost around \$400.

By comparison, a Frisian island such as Vlieland is located at a similar distance from the mainland, yet a return ferry ticket there is around four and a half times cheaper. Despite the high costs, the ferry remains the only viable option for many island inhabitants because most cannot afford to fly.

¹² Government response to the advice of the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure and the Council for Public Administration in relation to the physical living environment of the Caribbean Netherlands, Parliamentary Paper II, 2025Z19560 / 2025D45876

A 2023 analysis by SEO Amsterdam Economics shows that a Public Service Obligation (PSO) on the Windward Islands flight route could double the number of passenger movements and would improve the living standards of the inhabitants. Sint Eustatius and Saba have long called for such a measure and the Hartman Committee made the same recommendation in 2018 (SEO, 2018). It is estimated that the annual costs would not exceed \$7.6 million, based on a maximum ticket price of \$50 and at least two flights per day (SEO, 2023). These costs are currently being updated.

The Aviation Act BES is being amended, but it remains uncertain whether the government will also actually introduce a PSO. Air travel between the SSS islands is expected to remain too expensive for a number of years, because no additional measures are to be taken in the interim^{13,14}. There are also no plans as yet to make the connection between Bonaire and Sint Eustatius and Saba (via Sint Maarten) affordable. This speaks to the political unwillingness to take responsibility. Accessibility is a basic prerequisite for being able to participate in society, but without clear and long-term commitment from the government, this is yet another area in which equity remains out of reach for inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands.

Box 4: the ferry service connection

Since 2021, the Dutch government has subsidised a two-year Makana Ferry pilot project to improve the connection between the islands. The pilot was extended by a year in 2024, and the government has made 1.5 million euros available for the ferry service connection between the SSS islands in 2026 and 2027. This subsidy has brought down ticket prices and made the connection more accessible to many, including young people and those on a low income. The subsidy is temporary, however, despite the clear need for a long-term and reliable connection. Continuity, adequate frequency and affordable ticket prices are essential to ensure good availability. The market is too small for all of this to be organised by commercial parties, making government intervention unavoidable. No funding has yet been arranged for the Makana Ferry in the period after 2027.

¹³ The amendment of the Aviation (BES Islands) Act and the implementation of any PSO is expected to take at least two years.

¹⁴ Appendix to the Proceedings II 2025/26, no. 2026D06470

3.4.2 Physical infrastructure

The lack of investment in road infrastructure contributes to inequity both within the islands themselves and compared to the European Netherlands. The effects are not only economic. For those without a car, the distance to work, education, services such as an affordable supermarket, family and friends can quickly become a social distance. Vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children and people with a disability are most affected.

Many roads are outdated and maintenance is overdue. Heavy rainfall, which occurs more frequently due to climate change, regularly leads to dangerous situations. The chair of the State Commission Demographic Developments Caribbean Netherlands has compared the state of the infrastructure to that of the European Netherlands in the 1950s.¹⁵

On Saba and Sint Eustatius climate change, alongside poor maintenance, is a growing problem because the roads are unable to withstand extreme weather conditions. On Bonaire, population growth is the biggest issue (Rli, 2025). The road network has failed to grow in line with the number of vehicles, resulting in congestion and unsafe situations.

Catching up with this backlog is proving difficult. Road and infrastructure budgets have not kept pace with the increasing demand due to population growth, more intensive use, tourism and economic development. There is a lack not only of financial resources, but also personnel and expertise to make the necessary improvements.

3.4.3 Digital infrastructure

Internet access is a given in the European Netherlands. The connection is available, affordable and usually reliable. In the Caribbean Netherlands this is not the case. Despite temporary subsidies, internet and telephony costs are structurally higher than in the European Netherlands, whereas the quality and reliability are often lower. The remoteness means that the impact is greater. Those without an affordable and stable connection are sooner cut off from work, education, healthcare and social participation. The poor digital infrastructure affects both households and businesses (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2024), as well as increasing the inequity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands.

¹⁵ Meeting of the Lower House Committee for Kingdom Relations on the State Commission Demographic Developments Caribbean Netherlands — committee meeting on 17 October 2024.

Growing dependence on internet connections further widens this gap. While the European Netherlands enjoys the benefits of digital innovation, inhabitants, businesses and local authorities in the Caribbean Netherlands are left behind when it comes to digital government services, healthcare, education, work and day-to-day amenities such as the use of streaming services, online communication and social media. Within the islands themselves, a gap is also emerging between those who can and those who cannot afford the high internet costs.

The Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) concluded back in 2020 that the only way to resolve differences in internet rates is by providing end users with direct and ongoing subsidies similar to the level in the European Netherlands. Investment in fibre optic cables is also needed on Saba and Sint Eustatius, as well as research into whether alternatives such as satellite internet can further reduce digital inequality.

When both digital and physical mobility is accessible, affordable and safe, the playing field becomes more level. It is easier for people to connect, take part in society and contribute to economic and social development. This is exactly what Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba need to create a firm foundation for accessibility, as a basis for greater equity and self-reliance.

Box 5: unequal access to digital infrastructure

Research by the Amsterdam Bureau for Economics (2023) shows that the inequality in digital access varies within the Caribbean Netherlands. Sint Eustatius has the highest internet rates, followed by Saba and Bonaire. The quality also varies. Bonaire has the best connection, Saba the slowest and least reliable. The Windward Islands are worst affected, creating new inequality between the islands (Amsterdam Bureau for Economics, 2023).

3.5 Interim conclusion

This chapter shows that inequity in the Caribbean Netherlands is not a collection of separate challenges, but a structural and deep-rooted pattern. When it comes to socioeconomic security, healthcare, education and connectivity, the daily experience of the inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba is that they are not guaranteed the same amenities and protection as in the European Netherlands. The effects are visible and profound: persistent poverty despite employment, health inequalities, unequal educational opportunities from a young age and limited mobility that hinders social participation. Because these domains reinforce one another, inequity affects generation after generation. It impacts on the future prospects of all inhabitants and particularly young people and those in vulnerable positions.

Equity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands therefore requires focused and coordinated action that goes beyond mere acknowledgement. The next chapter outlines the normative framework. The chapter after that translates this analysis into specific actions needed to turn structural inequity into actual equity.

Part 2

4.

Normative framework

The two previous chapters showed how inequity occurs between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands in a number of key areas. One of the reasons that this inequity continues to exist is the lack of a clear and widely supported standard for equity. As long as there is no such clear standard, it will remain difficult to convert the problems identified into coherent and structural policies. This chapter therefore sets out a normative framework that serves as a basis for the recommendations in chapter 5. The framework acts as a guideline for these recommendations, but also for future policy and the laws and regulations needed to achieve actual equity.

4.1 The Netherlands and its principle of equality, duty of care and past

This advisory report is based on a clear constitutional and moral principle: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are an integral part of the Netherlands. Not only has this been an administrative agreement since 10-10-10, but it must also be reflected in the real-life experience. This means assimilating the standard of equity, which requires a different way of looking, thinking and acting. It must be a given in politics, policy and public opinion that inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands are not special or second-class citizens, but fully fledged inhabitants of the Netherlands who enjoy the same rights. And that when we talk about the Netherlands, it goes without saying that we are also talking about the inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands. This inclusive way of thinking needs to start with politicians as standard setters.

A second key normative choice is that a tailored approach must be the exception and is only justified when stemming from the principle of equality. The experience on the islands is that equity does not mean that exactly the same rules need to apply everywhere. The island context, small scale and geographical distance are sometimes reason to adapt the rules. But only if this is carefully justified and assessed against agreed standards and criteria. A tailored approach must be used for its intended purpose, which is to avoid or eliminate, not maintain, inequity. If the principle of equality is taken as the point of departure, it is clear that a tailored approach and equity are not polar opposites. When used correctly, they are two different ways of achieving the same goal.

Alongside the principle of equality, the Dutch State also has a duty of care. This goes beyond the prohibition of discrimination. The government also has an active responsibility: it must seek equity and cannot itself pursue policy that keeps anyone at a disadvantage or places them at a greater disadvantage. The State must not be a hindrance that undermines the equitable position of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. This specifically means, for example, that temporary measures such as ferry service subsidies or measures to increase purchasing power must not be phased out until there are sustainable alternatives. Yet that is currently what is being done in practice. It is in precisely these cases that the government needs to take responsibility for the inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. This requires it to take an ongoing, critical look at its own actions, the policies it pursues and their effects on actual equity on the islands.

The normative framework would be incomplete without acknowledging the colonial and post-colonial relationship that has given rise to the current inequity. The current structure of the Netherlands, with a European and a Caribbean part, is not a neutral situation. It is the result of a history of colonialism and slavery. The distance between the two parts of the Netherlands, not just in terms of geography but also in terms of the law, financing and political attention, stems from this history. This past has not been concluded. It continues to affect thinking, organisation and decision-making as well as the hierarchies that still exist in institutions and policy. Disadvantage does not come about by itself. In order to achieve equity between the European Netherlands and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, this reality must therefore be acknowledged, thinking must change within the European Netherlands, and efforts must be focused on ending the effects of this history in legislation, policy and institutions. Looking towards a shared future, all inhabitants of the Netherlands can then be protected against discrimination and treatment as second-class citizens.

The normative compass of this advisory report consists of four related basic principles. Each principle is an independent standard. Together, they are not a voluntary ambition but an administrative and moral duty.

Box 6: the normative compass

1. **Constitutional equality** must also be a given in politics, governance, the law and everyday life.
2. **A tailored approach is the exception** and only lawful when it stems from the principle of equality and therefore contributes to equity.
3. **The Dutch State has a duty of care:** to focus on ending inequity and to ensure that it does not play a role in exacerbating this inequity.
4. **The Netherlands' colonial and slavery past must be recognised** as the context in which the current inequity has arisen and as an integral part of the way forward.

4.2 Interim conclusion

A normative framework for equity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands is not voluntary. It has a moral and legal basis that stems from 10-10-10, the Constitution and international conventions. Explicitly designating equity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands as a standard and linking this to specific decision-making provides a moral touchstone. The key question is: what kind of country is the Netherlands and what kind of country do we want it to be? This normative framework forms the basis for the recommendations in the next chapter.

5.

**Doing justice
to the people
of Bonaire,
Sint Eustatius
and Saba**

Chapter 3 showed how the inequity manifests in practice: the area in which it is visible and its effect on inhabitants' daily lives. Chapter 2 established that equity is not a matter of goodwill, but rather a legal obligation enshrined in Article 1 of the Constitution. Whether or not equity is necessary is therefore no longer in dispute. The question is how to actually achieve equity.

This chapter translates the analysis from the previous chapters into specific recommendations for each domain, based on the normative framework from chapter 4.

5.1 Preconditions for equity: cross-domain recommendations

Recommendation 1
Develop and introduce a regulatory and enforcement framework (equity framework) for the comply or explain policy.

This measure will establish clear criteria and standards for choosing between harmonisation (a level playing field) and differentiation (a tailored approach) based on the principle of equality, thus avoiding a tailored approach becoming an excuse for not achieving equity. Including enforcement in the framework ensures that the obligation to provide reasons, in the case of both different and the same rules, is always met and is an integral part of the policy cycle.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Apply the equity framework, and therefore the comply or explain principle, to all legislation before and after 2019.
- Include a mandatory test for the comply or explain explanation regarding equity in every policy and legislative process.
- Always clarify in the explanatory memorandum to legislation how harmonisation or differentiation relates to equity.
- Where regulations differ, explicitly justify how the purpose of the law is being achieved in a different, more appropriate way.
- Involve Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights in developing the equity framework.
- Develop a dashboard with an accountability cycle that can be publicly accessed and consulted as part of the framework.
- Realise these measures before the end of 2026.

Quick win: add a fixed section in the explanatory memorandums that ensures personal data protection for inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

This quick win will ensure the qualitative substantiation of regulations, taking particular care to afford the same level of personal data protection to the inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands as those of the European Netherlands.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Ensure that the personal data of inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba has the same level of protection as the personal data of inhabitants of the European Netherlands.
- Take into account the recommendations of the Personal Data Protection Supervisory Committee for the BES Islands (CBP BES) in the legislative procedures.

Recommendation 2

Reformulate the differentiation clause (Article 132a paragraph 4) in the Constitution, returning the focus to positive deviation (positive discrimination).

This measure will provide legal clarity and emphasise the original intention of the clause: to provide scope for additional efforts where needed to promote equity.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Reiterate once and for all that the principle of equality is the basis for both harmonisation and difference, and that additional effort is justified and sometimes necessary to achieve equity.
- Use the amendment of the differentiation clause as a basis for this normative principle and developing the equity framework.
- Initiate the process of amending the constitution before the end of 2026.

Quick win: the Netherlands ratifies all human rights conventions that do not currently apply to the Caribbean Netherlands as soon as possible.

The unequal human right protections are a major cause of inequity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands. If equity is taken seriously, international human rights conventions and particularly those concerning basic rights and social rights must also be applied to the Caribbean Netherlands as soon as possible.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Involve Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, but also the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, in amending the overview of legislation and in the accelerated ratification of human rights conventions.
- Also look at how long it will take to ensure that all European regulations and directives apply to Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.
- Ratify all international human rights conventions that do not currently apply to the Caribbean Netherlands by 2030, with scope for a tailored approach.
- Publish an amended overview of legislation before the end of 2026, along with a detailed time frame for ratification of the human rights conventions.

Quick win: set up a Caribbean executive pool to bundle expertise from the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands, particularly the islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

A joint pool will mean that the available capacity can be deployed in a more flexible way, projects can be carried out faster and backlogs can be cleared sooner. Avoiding a situation in which a lack of implementation capacity is constantly used as a reason to postpone necessary improvements.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Use the executive pool to reduce backlogs in implementation and services in areas such as infrastructure, permit granting, education and public services.
- Organise the pool as a one-stop shop for the public bodies so that implementation requests are submitted through a single channel and can be quickly matched with available professionals from both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands.
- Organise contracts for a minimum term of one year where possible to ensure greater continuity.
- Devote extra attention to recruiting island children who live in the European Netherlands, as part of brain gain.
- Draw inspiration from VNG International's Caribbean Exchange Network.¹⁶
- Set up the executive pool by the end of 2026.

¹⁶ [VNG and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom | VNG](#)

5.2 Recommendations on socioeconomic security

Recommendation 3 Develop and introduce a National Programme for Social Equality and Participation for the Caribbean Netherlands.

The issue of poverty on the islands is complex and has been neglected for too long. An effective approach requires a cohesive strategy with clear goals, sufficient funding and a long-term plan. Stable and predictable commitment is essential to avoid a constant need for temporary measures to solve the biggest problems.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Appoint an independent, multidisciplinary, intercultural and implementing taskforce.
- As part of the National Programme, accelerate the follow-up of all the recommendations made by the Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee, with an emphasis on:
 - Simultaneous measures on the income side and on the cost side of the subsistence minimum.
 - Long-term cost reduction by means of permanent subsidies for utilities such as water, electricity, telecom and internet, to guarantee essential services in the medium term.
 - Establishing a full and verifiable subsistence minimum to which the statutory minimum wage and welfare benefits are linked.
 - Strengthening the social safety net so that the level of protection and accessibility become equivalent to those in the European Netherlands.
 - Accelerating the construction of affordable public-sector rented accommodation and permanently reducing housing costs.
- Task the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) with comprehensively monitoring income development and the cost of living on an annual basis to facilitate timely policy adjustments.
- Task the SCP with developing calculation models for scenarios that are realistic for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.
- Draw up a roadmap in this government's term of office for implementing the recommendations of the Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee.
- Seek to reduce the poverty rate by at least 50% by 2035.

Quick win: introduce an immediate price cap for essential utilities, including the internet, on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

This measure will immediately reduce the biggest costs for households and reflects the urgency of the situation. The price cap must be a first step towards the National Programme for Social Equality and Participation.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Make the price cap dependent on income to ensure that higher incomes continue to contribute.
- Combine the price cap with a compensation scheme for providers to avoid market distortion.
- Leave the price cap in place until the National Programme has been introduced to ensure that temporary purchasing power measures do not come to an end without an alternative and rising network costs are not passed on to households.
- Introduce immediate and structural internet subsidies for end users, as recommended by the ACM in 2020.
- Structurally introduce the price cap in mid 2026.

Quick win: enshrine structural collaboration and funding for debt assistance in the Caribbean Netherlands, under the direction of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Effective debt assistance plays an essential role in long-term socioeconomic security and participation in society. This measure will provide immediate relief for people who are in debt, as well as helping to avoid long-term or generational poverty.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Make funds available for individual debt assistance in keeping with the local context and the small scale of the islands.
- Allow scope for instruments such as partial debt forgiveness in exchange for a social quid pro quo, if this contributes to a lasting solution.
- Draw inspiration from existing initiatives in the European Netherlands, such as the Schuldenlab.
- Realise these measures by the end of 2026.

5.3 Recommendations on healthcare

Recommendation 4

The Netherlands needs to review and define the roles within the healthcare system in the Caribbean Netherlands in the short term.

This recommendation relates to a clear separation of policy making, implementation, healthcare procurement and health insurance. A clear division of tasks is essential to better ensure the quality of healthcare on the basis of equity.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Stop concentrating these roles within a single ministerial structure of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.
- First examine whether the European Netherlands system can be fully applied in the Caribbean Netherlands, based on equivalent healthcare. Costs cannot be an overriding argument.
- Strictly separate policy and legislation from implementation and healthcare procurement, and explore whether European Netherlands health insurers can fulfil the role of healthcare buyer.
- Reinforce external and independent research and oversight by granting a full mandate for the Caribbean Netherlands to national planning agencies and advisory bodies, such as the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and the Council of Public Health and Society (RVS).
- Utilise the expertise of the Dutch Healthcare Authority (NZa), the National Healthcare Institute (ZIN) and the Association of Dutch Healthcare Insurers (ZN) when further developing healthcare procurement, health insurance and accessibility of healthcare in the Caribbean Netherlands.
- Focus on quality and oversight based on the principle of equity when restructuring the healthcare system.

Recommendation 5

Set up a multidisciplinary scientific advisory board with responsibility for making recommendations for sustainable, equivalent healthcare on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

The aim of this measure is to ensure equivalent healthcare with a scientific basis. The actions and recommendations identified by the advisory board

will be developed from a starting point of equivalent healthcare for inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Use the 2024 Caribbean Netherlands Health Systems Review as a focal point for the advisory board's activities.
- Task the board with exploring a new way of structuring tasks within the healthcare system (recommendation 4).
- Ask the board to draw up standards for medical care on the islands.
- Ensure that the scientific advisory board's responsibilities specifically include prevention, with a focus on socioeconomic security, taking into account the final report on the long-term health effects of slavery.
- Add the board's recommendations to those of the 2nd Goedgedrag Committee.
- Ensure that the board commences its activities before the end of 2026.

Quick win: reduce the burden on patients and their families in the event of medical transfers.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Focus not only on the quality of healthcare but also on the burden for patients and their families in the event of medical transfers.
- View medical care and emergency care as a Kingdom affair.
- Remove financial obstacles to healthcare access by fully reimbursing travel time, waiting time, assistance and aftercare costs.
- Realise these measures before the end of 2027.

Quick win: organise a productive and equivalent partnership between the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the local healthcare parties.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Extend the exception rules that apply to BIG registration and the BES exemption to make it easier to deploy doctors from the region and from the European Netherlands.
- Promote continuity of personnel by appointing doctors and specialists for longer terms where possible, following the example of Mental Health Caribbean.
- Realise these measures before the end of 2027.

Quick win: safeguard the quality and safety of healthcare in hospitals outside the islands to achieve equity for the Caribbean Netherlands.

This quick win ensures independent oversight of the quality of secondary care provided outside the islands, with patient safety as the guiding principle. This too is part of equivalent healthcare: patients on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba deserve the same level of patient safety as patients in the European Netherlands.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Draw up a strict oversight and accountability framework (quality oversight framework) for healthcare outside the Netherlands.
- Make an independent party responsible for oversight and provide this party with sufficient resources.
- Adopt clear quality standards and enforcement frameworks that correspond to the level of protection in the European Netherlands.
- Guarantee equivalent legal protection in the event of medical transfers.
- Reach clear agreements on the division of roles, powers and intervention options in the event of shortcomings.
- Task SCP to publish an annual report on the quality, accessibility and financial sustainability of healthcare.
- Develop and introduce the quality framework before the end of 2026.

5.4 Recommendations on education

Recommendation 6
Waive student loans for island children who want to return to Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

This measure will encourage brain gain on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba by removing a major financial obstacle.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Utilise other opportunities for brain gain at the same time as waiving student debt, by strengthening and updating educational infrastructure on the islands, improving socioeconomic security and encouraging businesses to set up traineeships for young jobseekers.
- Take inspiration from previous waiver schemes in which the student loan was converted into a non-repayable grant in exchange for returning and contributing to social development.
- Realise these measures before 2027.

Quick win: extend the exception rule for teaching staff and introduce this rule on Sint Eustatius and Saba.

This quick win aims to reduce the shortage of teaching staff on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. It addresses the regulatory burden that is not in keeping with the island context and does not take into account the acute effects of the current structural shortages.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Work with school boards and the Public Entity of Saba to determine what is required to extend the current exception rule for Saba to meet the needs on Saba.
- Also introduce the exception rule that currently applies to Saba to Sint Eustatius before the start of the 2026 academic year. At the same time, discuss with school boards and the Public Entity of Sint Eustatius what a revised version of this rule should look like for Sint Eustatius.
- Place a particular emphasis on recruiting and retaining specialist staff on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba for pupils with care needs, including earmarking funds to the centres of expertise for special educational needs (EOZs).
- Realise these measures before the start of the new academic year in 2027.

Quick win: make a permanent provision in the central government budget for educational accommodation, from renovations to small-scale maintenance.

This quick win accelerates the release of funds for the remaining refurbishment and renovation of schools on Bonaire and Sint Eustatius, to guarantee good learning conditions for these pupils too.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Starting in the 2026 central government budget, release funds for accommodation programmes on Sint Eustatius and Bonaire.
- Collaborate with the Public Entities of Bonaire and Sint Eustatius with the aim of completing the construction and renovation task before the end of 2027.
- Reach clear agreements with the public bodies and school boards on the division of maintenance responsibilities, and more actively support school boards in implementing long-term school building maintenance programmes.

5.5 Recommendations on connectivity and infrastructure

Recommendation 7

Develop and introduce a BES infrastructure fund for systematic and long-term funding of infrastructure in the Caribbean Netherlands.

This recommendation ensures long-term funding for the major infrastructure task on Bonaire and Sint Eustatius, and to a lesser extent on Saba. The BES infrastructure fund fills the gap left by failure to apply the Mobility Fund (Mobiliteitsfonds) and the Delta Fund (Deltafonds) to inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Develop the BES infrastructure fund as part of the long-term cooperation agenda for the physical living environment.
- Use the BES infrastructure fund primarily to catch up with the backlog in physical infrastructure, taking into account the unique challenges faced by each island.
- Give the Public Entities and businesses established in the Caribbean Netherlands access to all national development funds.
- Liaise with the Public Entities on a review of the division of tasks in the physical living environment agreed in 2010.
- Realise these measures before 2028.

Quick win: accelerate the introduction of a Public Service Obligation (PSO) for the SSS islands.

This measure makes air travel affordable for inhabitants of Saba and Sint Eustatius, helping the inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands to participate in society and exercise their other human rights.

The NCDR advises the government to:

- Bring forward approval of the introduction of the PSO for the Windward Islands, in any event to before the amendment of the Aviation (BES Islands) Act.
- Ensure that there is also an affordable flight connection between Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.
- Guarantee the affordability of the Makana Ferry by providing subsidies from 2027 onwards, at least until the PSO is introduced.
- Guarantee the affordability of air travel by reaching temporary price agreements with Winair, at least until the PSO is introduced.
- Introduce the PSO by the start of 2028.

6.

Final word

Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are an integral part of the Netherlands. This advisory report underlines what this means in legal terms: the principle of equality applies in full to this part of the Netherlands and Article 1 of the Constitution is the constitutional framework for equity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands. The major inequity that currently exists between the two parts of the Netherlands therefore cannot be justified.

We cannot continue to accept the disadvantaging of inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands as a reality. Catching up takes time, but the current progress is too slow. Public administrators, politicians, civil servants and civil society organisations in both the Caribbean Netherlands and the European Netherlands are jointly responsible for this process. Everyone needs to take ownership, have courage and engage. At the same time, this responsibility is not shared equally. The Dutch government and parliament bear the greatest burden as the party with ultimate responsibility. This responsibility is the result of our shared past, Article 1 of the Constitution and the State's duty of care towards its citizens.

The NCDR conference on Bonaire in 2025 made it clear once again that inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba no longer want to be treated as an afterthought. The Dutch government cannot put off its responsibility any longer. The choice the Netherlands made on 10-10-10 has a direct impact on human rights and must, certainly after fifteen years, be honoured in full. It is a moral obligation. Remoteness, limited implementation capacity, lack of resources and legislative delays are no longer acceptable excuses for higher poverty rates, less accessible care and unequal educational opportunities. If the system does not work, it needs to change. If resources are lacking, they need to be made available. Socioeconomic security and equal opportunities for inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands are not a courtesy, but are instead key to the question of the type of country the Netherlands wants to be.

This advisory report therefore calls for an urgent and serious approach to the principle of equality and an end to second-class citizenship for the inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Not everything can be solved tomorrow, but the direction is clear. A normative framework has been set out, the recommendations have been laid on the table and the first steps can be taken without delay. The question is no longer whether equity is needed, but whether we are prepared to bear the consequences. We need to take joint responsibility, as we do for every municipality in the European Netherlands. Direct action is both possible and necessary, and starts with setting clear standards.

Glossary

10-10-10

The date 10 October 2010, on which Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba became special municipalities of the Netherlands. This date marks the constitutional reform of the former Netherlands Antilles.

Absorption capacity

The ability of an organisation or government to effectively incorporate and implement resources, policy measures and investments. Absorption capacity is sometimes used in the context of the Caribbean Netherlands as a reason for not taking action to ensure equity, which the NCDR considers unacceptable.

Anti-Discrimination Protection Act for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba

The Anti-Discrimination (BES Islands) Act entered into force on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba on 1 January 2026. The Act makes equal treatment legislation applicable to the islands and gives inhabitants access to the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights.

Antidiscrimination agency

An organisation or authority that people can contact to file a report or obtain advice and support if they have a complaint about discrimination. An antidiscrimination agency also carries out activities to prevent and raise awareness of discrimination in society.

BES

Acronym for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. The acronym BES is used in laws and regulations that specifically apply to these three islands as special municipalities of the Netherlands.

BES exemption

A temporary exemption that foreign care professionals who are not BIG-registered can apply for in order to provide care on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Applications for a BES exemption are often rejected.

BIG registration

The register of care providers in the Netherlands (Beroepen in de Individuele Gezondheidszorg, Individual Healthcare Professions). BIG registration is required in order to legally provide care. Doctors from the region are often not BIG-registered, which makes it difficult for them to work on the islands.

Brain drain

The continuous exodus of trained and talented island inhabitants to the European Netherlands or elsewhere, who often do not return. Brain drain results in loss of knowledge, skills and future leadership on the islands.

Brain gain

Encouraging island inhabitants who have studied or worked elsewhere to return so that they can contribute to the development of the islands. Brain gain is the opposite of brain drain.

Breach of trust

The breach of trust is the major gap in trust between inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands and the Dutch State. This gap is the result of decades of structural disadvantage and repeated failure to deliver on promises of equity.

Caribbean Netherlands

The Caribbean Netherlands is the collective name for the three special municipalities of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. It is the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, situated in the Caribbean Sea.

Caribbean Netherlands Social Minimum Committee

An advisory committee that reported in 2023 on the living conditions and social minimum, or minimum income standard, on the islands. The committee concluded that the situation is 'unworthy of the Netherlands'.

Colonial and slavery past

Colonial and slavery past refers to the history of colonialism and slavery that has helped shape current relations between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands. The NCDR acknowledge this history as the context for the current structural inequity.

Comply or explain

The policy designed to implement the principle that all laws, regulations and reinforcement of policy measures generally apply to the Caribbean Netherlands (harmonisation), unless there are compelling reasons to depart from this rule (differentiation). Comply or explain provides a framework for Article 1 of the Constitution.

Connectivity

The inter-island connection between islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, particularly Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, with Sint Maarten as a hub. This mainly consists of flights, but can also be ferry service connections.

Constitution (Article 1)

Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution prohibits discrimination and guarantees that all persons are treated equally in equal circumstances. It is the legal basis of this advisory report.

Constitutional reform

The constitutional reform refers to the reorganisation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on 10-10-10, which saw the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba become special municipalities of the Netherlands.

CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council)

The CXC is a regional examining body in the Caribbean that conducts secondary education exams on Sint Eustatius and Saba. Dutch is a compulsory exam subject within this system.

Democratic deficit

The term 'democratic deficit' refers to the limited direct representation of inhabitants of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba in the Dutch parliament. The islands do not have any directly elected representatives in the House of Representatives.

Differentiation

Differentiation is the conscious application of rules to the Caribbean Netherlands that differ to those that apply to the European Netherlands. This is only lawful where objectively substantiated and stemming from the principle of equality. See also: comply or explain.

Differentiation clause

Article 132a paragraph 4 of the Constitution, which explicitly states that a distinction may be made in certain cases between Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba on the one hand, and the European Netherlands on the other hand.

Disadvantage

The systematic unequal treatment of a specific group of people by the government, by giving them less access to certain rights, resources or opportunities than other groups, which can lead to social and economic inequality.

Discrimination

The unjustified differentiation between individuals or groups based on personal characteristics, resulting in unequal treatment or exclusion from access to rights, facilities or services.

Duty of care

The government's responsibility to take care of all its inhabitants, including the inhabitants of the Caribbean part of the Netherlands.

ECHR (European Convention on Human Rights)

The ECHR is an international convention that protects fundamental rights and freedoms. Article 14 of the ECHR prohibits discrimination. In the Greenpeace case, the court ruled that this Article had been breached in relation to Bonaire.

EOZ (centres of expertise for special educational needs)

EOZs are organisations that provide specialist educational support to pupils who have additional care or educational needs in the Caribbean Netherlands. At present, EOZs are often only able to offer a few hours of support each day.

Equality

Based on the principle of equality referred to in Article 1 of the Constitution, which states that all persons shall be treated equally in equal circumstances.

Equity

The principle that everyone is entitled to the same rights, opportunities and the same level of respect, regardless of differences in background, identity or where they live in the Netherlands.

Equity framework

The equity framework is a regulatory and enforcement framework proposed by the NCDR that sets out specific criteria and standards for the balance between harmonisation and differentiation. The equality framework is based on the principle of equality.

European Netherlands

The European Netherlands is the part of the Netherlands situated on the continent of Europe, including the mainland provinces. The Caribbean part of the Netherlands and the European Netherlands together form the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This advisory report focuses on the inequity compared to the Caribbean Netherlands.

Explanatory memorandum

A document drawn up by the government to clarify and justify a legislative proposal, which includes an explanation of the content, purpose and consequences of the proposed law.

Harmonisation

Harmonisation is the alignment of laws and regulations between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands. It is the underlying principle of the comply or explain policy. See also: differentiation.

Hartman Committee

The Hartman Committee advised in 2018 on the connectivity between the Windward Islands, including the introduction of a Public Service Obligation (PSO) for air travel.

Health inequalities

Health inequalities are structural differences in health and health outcomes between population groups. On average, inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands have more health problems than inhabitants of the European Netherlands.

Human rights conventions

Human rights conventions are international conventions that set out fundamental human rights. A number of conventions apply to the European Netherlands but not to the Caribbean Netherlands, resulting in unequal legal protection.

IGJ (Health and Youth Care Inspectorate)

The IGJ is the authority in the Netherlands that oversees the quality and safety of healthcare and youth services. The IGJ does not have full powers to oversee care outside the islands to which Caribbean-Netherlands patients are referred.

Island children

Island children are young people who have grown up on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba or one of the other islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, many of whom have departed for the European Netherlands to study or work. Encouraging island children to return is a key aspect of brain gain.

Island penalty

The island penalty is the undesirable disadvantage that inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands experience in access to healthcare, education and services, solely due to the isolated nature of where they live. The NCDR calls for an end to the island penalty.

Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The convention does not apply to the Caribbean Netherlands.

Integrated approach

An integrated approach means that poverty, health, education and accessibility are not dealt with as separate problems, but are instead tackled together. This is necessary because these domains reinforce one another.

Inequality of opportunity

Inequality of opportunity is the structural inequality in the opportunities people have for a good education, work, income and participation in society. Inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands systematically face inequality of opportunity compared to those of the European Netherlands.

Lanzarote Convention

The Lanzarote Convention is the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. The convention does not apply to the Caribbean Netherlands.

Legislative restraint

Legislative restraint was the policy prior to 2019, under which new Dutch legislation was consistently slow to reach the islands. This led to major inequality in rights and protection and has since been replaced by the comply or explain principle.

Makana Ferry

The Makana Ferry is a ferry service between the SSS islands (Sint Eustatius, Saba and Sint Maarten) that is subsidised by the Dutch government. The government has pledged to continue the subsidy until the end of 2027. No funding is currently available for the period from 2028 onwards.

Medical transfer

A medical transfer is when a patient on the islands is referred to a hospital or specialist outside their own island, often on another island or in another country. Medical transfers involve high indirect costs for the patient.

National Social Equality and Participation Programme

The National Social Equality and Participation Programme is a cohesive strategy proposed by the NCDR with clear objectives, funding and a long-term plan to combat poverty on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

NCDR (National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism)

The NCDR is an independent government body that identifies, analyses and raises awareness of discrimination and racism in the Netherlands. The NCDR is the author of this advisory report and issues both solicited and unsolicited advice.

Netherlands Institute for Human Rights

The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights is the Dutch national human rights institute that oversees compliance with human rights and equal treatment legislation. Inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands have been able to file a request with this body since 2026.

Normative framework

Starting point and yardstick used to determine the minimum requirements for equity between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands.

OCT (Overseas Countries and Territories)

OCT status is the EU status of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. As OCTs, EU law is not fully applicable and inhabitants have little access to European social rights. OCT status is different to the OMR (Outermost Region) status of France's overseas territories.

OMR (Outermost Region)

OMR status is the EU status of the French overseas departments. EU law applies in full to territories with OMR status, with scope for specific adjustments. OMR status is different to the OCT status of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba.

Positive discrimination

Positive discrimination means consciously promoting equal opportunities by taking additional measures for disadvantaged groups. In this advisory report, positive discrimination is also referred to as ‘comply plus’: an above-average effort to overcome disadvantages.

Positive obligations

Positive obligations are the State’s active obligations to protect and promote fundamental rights, alongside the negative obligation not to discriminate. In the Greenpeace case, the court ruled that the State has failed to meet these obligations in relation to Bonaire.

Priced out of paradise

An informal term referring to a situation where the rising cost of living means that the local, often black population of the islands can no longer afford to live in their own environment.

Principle of equality

The principle of equality is enshrined in Article 1 of the Constitution and means that all persons in the Netherlands will be treated equally in equal circumstances. It is the constitutional basis of this advisory report.

PSO (Public Service Obligation)

A PSO is an obligation that the government can impose on an airline to operate a route with a minimum frequency and maximum ticket price. Research shows that a PSO on the SSS islands can double the number of passenger movements.

Public body

The public body is the form of administration on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba as special municipalities. A public body is similar to a municipality in the European Netherlands, but has its own powers and regulations.

Quick wins

Targeted short-term measures that can be implemented within existing frameworks and that contribute towards structural improvement.

Racism

An ideology, practice or structure that makes a distinction, stereotypes or prejudices against people based on presumed racial, ethnic or cultural characteristics, leading to structural inequality.

Second-class citizen

A second-class citizen is someone who formally has equal rights, but who consistently receives less protection, resources and opportunities in practice. The NCDR argues that inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands are treated as second-class citizens in practice.

Second Goedgedrag Committee

The Second Goedgedrag Committee has drawn up recommendations for healthcare in the Caribbean Netherlands. The NCDR’s advice is to combine these recommendations with those made by any scientific advisory board that is set up.

Social minimum

The minimum net income that an inhabitant of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba needs to cover the essential costs of living and social participation.

Socioeconomic security

Socioeconomic security is a guarantee that people can meet their basic needs, such as income, housing, food and access to services. In this advisory report, socioeconomic security is a basic precondition for equity.

Special municipality

The constitutional status of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba as part of the system of government in the Netherlands. A special municipality is similar to a normal Dutch municipality, but with differences in laws and regulations.

SSS islands

The SSS islands is a collective term that refers to the Windward islands Sint Eustatius, Saba and Sint Maarten. Sint Maarten acts as a transport and service hub for Sint Eustatius and Saba.

Starting qualification

A starting qualification is a diploma at a minimum of secondary vocational education (MBO) level 2, a senior general secondary education (HAVO) diploma or a pre-university education (VWO) certificate. It is the minimum basis for sustainable labour market participation. Only around 42% of the population of Sint Eustatius has obtained a starting qualification.

Structural discrimination or disadvantage

Forms of discrimination that stem from institutional standards, routines and systems and that are not limited to individual intentions or incidents.

Tailored approach

A tailored approach involves applying rules of policy to the specific context of the islands. The NCDR emphasises that a tailored approach is only lawful when it stems from the principle of equality and contributes to equity and not as a licence for inequality.

UN Disabilities Convention

The UN Disabilities Convention is the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The convention does not apply to the Caribbean Netherlands.

Working poor

Working poor are people who despite being in paid employment, in some cases working multiple jobs, do not earn enough to make ends meet due to the high cost of living. This is a structural problem on the islands.

ZJCN (Zorg en Jeugd Caribisch Nederland, Care and Youth Caribbean Netherlands)

ZJCN is the department of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport that develops policy and legislation as well as implementing care and youth care on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. ZJCN therefore performs several roles at the same time.

ZVK (Zorgverzekeringskantoor Caribisch Nederland, Health Insurance Office for the Caribbean Netherlands)

The ZVK is the public health insurance provider on the islands. It performs the role fulfilled by private health insurers in the European Netherlands and is part of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

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Colophon

The National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism (NCDR) was set up in 2021 and issues advice to the government and parliament on combating discrimination and racism in the Netherlands, both when asked and on its own initiative. The NCDR operates independently in identifying and raising awareness of problems, paying particular attention to structural and cross-sector issues. Its advisory reports are based on research, practical knowledge and social dialogue, and focus on developing long-term policy and embedding this policy within the governance structure.

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